



Mojgan Mohammadimehr*
Department of Laboratory
Sciences, Faculty of
Paramedical Sciences, Aja
University of
Medical Sciences, Tehran,
Iran

*Aja University of Medical
Sciences
Shahid Etemadzadeh St.
Tehran, 1411718541
Iran

Tel: +98 2143822995
Fax: +98 2188337943
Email:
M.Mohammadimehr@ajau
ms.ac.ir

LETTER to EDITOR

e-Learning as an educational response to COVID-19 epidemic in Iran: The role of the learner support system

Dear Editor,

Around the world, the spread of Coronavirus disease, COVID-19, has led to some basic changes in social and organizational interactions; hence, the education has not been immune (1). Coronavirus pandemic has stopped the activities of many universities in 188 countries and caused serious changes in their higher education system (2). According to UNESCO, more than one and a half billion students (More than 91% of the world's students) have been affected by the corona pandemic, as well as their education system has undergone serious changes; the changes that have been made either publicly or by universities as well as educational institutions (3).

Education is one of the important factors in the development and progress of any country. Covid-19 has revolutionized the education system around the world, and now students are experiencing a different way of studying in this crisis. As a result of the outbreak of coronavirus, universities are facing unprecedented challenges. In response to this global emergency, the world's higher education institutions have been forced to close university campuses because of the coronavirus and resort to online learning and digital tools. Many universities are trying to ensure that current students are recruited while maintaining their current education, and they try to provide clear communication with staff and students so that they can overcome the crisis.

e-learning is a method of designing, compiling, presenting, and evaluating education that utilizes e-learning capabilities to facilitate learning. e-learning is an educational method that has been created because of the advent of the Internet, technology development, and its capabilities. In fact, the method of distance learning has evolved and met the needs of people exploring and wanting to learn. (4)

One of the most important factors in distance learning and e-learning is supporting learners to succeed in their education. The results of various studies showed that using appropriate technical environments and supporting virtual learning systems can be successful in schools or higher education (4). The Learner Support System allows learners to use activities and tools to support their own learning so that they may satisfy themselves. Learners can control their learning according to their personal abilities through the learning support system. Meanwhile, teachers and classmates play the role of their learning assistants (5). Simpson, defined learner support in a broad term as "all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their study". He extended his definition into two major learner support services. The first category included academic support covering all areas, such as defining course territory, explaining concepts, exploring the course, feedback, developing learning skills, and chasing progress and

enrichment (extending the boundaries of the course and sharing the excitement of learning). The second grouping of activities consisted of advising (giving information, exploring problems and suggesting directions), assessment (providing feedback to the individual on non-academic aptitudes and skills), action (dealing with practical help to promote study), advocacy (making out a case for funding and writing a reference), agitation (promoting changes within the institution to benefit students), and organizing student support (6). With the sudden changes in the education system of countries the Corona pandemic has spread in, and the holding of online classes and distance learning, this question arises that to what extent this type of education can be effective and efficient for students. Are the factors and components of the student support system considered properly in the implementation of these programs?

Similar to other countries, social distance in Iran is followed by the closure of schools and universities. This prompts our country's education authorities to take some steps to prevent this from happening, so that they can plan to teach in new and virtual ways as well as to conduct online exams. Although the prevalence of coronavirus disease in our country has posed problems and difficulties for the education system, it has created an opportunity for new educational solutions to be tested. The semi-structured interview with the students of Aja University of Medical Sciences in 2020 showed the necessity and importance of professors' interaction and communication in distance learning with them; however, the students said that one of the weaknesses of e-learning in the Corona crisis is the decline of professors' interaction with students. In addition, weak internet bandwidth, financial problems for some students in terms of welfare and poor internet access, and some technical problems in terms of hardware and software were other challenges students experienced in online classes in the Corona crisis. It is recommended that considering the continuation of Corona's presence and continuing education in universities and schools, educational officials and professors benefit from the obtained experience, as well as the weaknesses and strengths in holding effective and successful online classes in the new academic semester. Also, for the educational well-being of students, the support system of the learner should be properly considered, especially the support of interactions and effective interaction between the teacher and the learner should be supported. In this regard, by training professors and students, interacting in the e-learning system can be taught appropriately.

Ethical considerations: Ethical issues (Including plagiarism, informed consent, data fabrication, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been

completely observed by the author.

Conflict of interest: None to be declare.

REFERENCES

1. Murphy M PA. COVID-19 and emergency eLearning: Consequences of the securitization of higher education for post-pandemic pedagogy. *Contemp Secur Policy*. 2020;41(6):492-505.
 2. Higher education during COVID 19: Overview of the actions and decisions of various universities around the world in the face of the Corona pandemic (COVID 19). Isfahan University of Technology International Scientific Cooperation Center. 2020. [internet]. available: http://elearning.msrt.ir/download/docs/990125_Universities_and_Covid19.pdf. Persian.
 3. Global monitoring of school closed by COVID-19. available: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/education-response>.
 4. Moore MG, Kearsley G. *Distance Education: A Systems View of Online Learning (What's New in Education)*. (3rd ed). Cengage Learning. 2011. ISBN 978-1-111-52099-1.
 5. Sintema E J. Effect of COVID-19 on the Performance of Grade 12 Students: Implications for STEM Education. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*. 2020;16(7): em1851.
 6. Chatpakkarattana T, Khlaisang J. The learner support system for distance education. *Creat Educ*. 2012; 3: 47-51.
- Simpson O. *Supporting students in online, open and distance learning*. London: Kogan Page. 2002.